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OPERATIONAL DECEPTION  
and the  
PRINCIPLES OF WAR

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

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Abstract of  
OPERATIONAL DECEPTION  
and the PRINCIPLES OF WAR

Deception has proved its significance repeatedly throughout military history. Its utility as a force multiplier is universally accepted among military practitioners.

Considering the recent force reductions caused by Post Cold War economic realities and an expanding national aversion to combat casualties, increased focus on operational deception (OPDEC) is warranted. This paper focuses on contemporary OPDEC planning considerations and examines their relevance from a historical perspective. Additionally, it will assess OPDEC's contribution to selected "principles of war" from a theoretical viewpoint. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to the future value of OPDEC to the operational commander.

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OPERATIONAL DECEPTION  
and the PRINCIPLES OF WAR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*Forgoing the use of deception in war is tantamount to undermining one's own strength. Therefore, when all other elements of strength in war are approximately equal, deception will further amplify the available strength of a state--or allow it to use its force more economically by achieving victory at a lower cost and with fewer casualties.<sup>1</sup>*

The American Heritage Dictionary defines deception as "a ruse or trick; to cause to believe what is not true; mislead."<sup>2</sup> The word's origins can be traced back to many cultures. To the English it was known as *decepcioun*, to the French, as *deception*, and finally, to the Italians, as *deceptio* or *deceptus*.<sup>3</sup> It has been employed militarily throughout the ages, and received commanding attention in many famous military writings, including Sun Tzu's 4th century B.C. essays on "The Art of War," the earliest known treatises on the subject. "The strategic and tactical doctrines expounded in 'The Art of War' are based on deception, the creation of false appearances to mystify and delude the enemy situation, ...."<sup>4</sup> In contemporary military jargon, deception is often called stratagem. Thus, in war "the ultimate goal of stratagem is to make the enemy quite certain, very decisive, and wrong."<sup>5</sup> Finally, the Doctrine for Joint Operational

Deception defines deception as "... measures designed to mislead the enemy by manipulation, distortion, or falsification of evidence to induce him to react in a manner prejudicial to his interests."<sup>6</sup>

Military deception may take many forms, a few of which are feints, demonstrations and acclimatization. A feint is a mock attack or simulation of preparation for a forthcoming attack. Its objective is to divert or concentrate the enemy without tying down friendly forces in battle or incurring the losses of battle. On the other hand, a demonstration involves an actual commitment to battle. Here, the objective is to draw the enemy into an irrelevant battle. It is important to recognize the difference between the two, for if circumstances permit, "a sophisticated deception plan can usually assure that a cheap feint will prove more effective than a costly demonstration."<sup>7</sup> Acclimatization is the process in which the target of deception is lulled into a state of complacency by repetitive, seemingly benign actions that mask real intentions, such as preparation for battle.

In the art of deception, camouflage and disinformation play critical supporting roles. Camouflage contributes two key functions: 1) "negative" or dissimulative camouflage that conceals military objects, and 2) "positive" or simulative camouflage in which dummy military objects are displayed to mislead the enemy (see Figure 1). The disinformation process utilizes any communication channel capable of transmitting

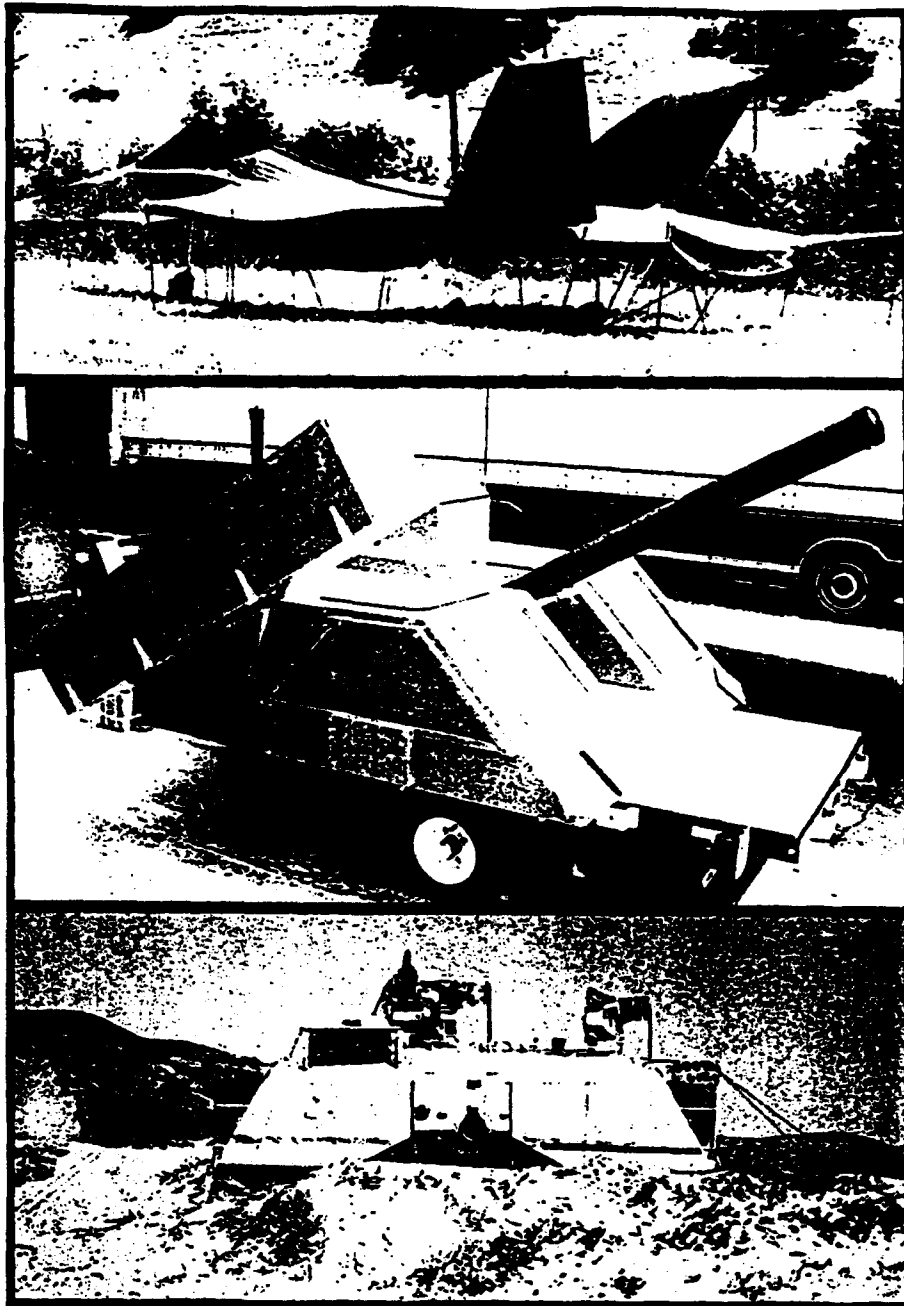


Figure 1<sup>o</sup>  
 Simulative Camouflage: (top down) F/A-18; tank; air defence simulator.

information to transmit irrelevant and relevant, but false, information.

History has proven that when successful, and it usually



is, deception is one of the key force multipliers that the operational commander has at his disposal. But to be effective, deception, or in the military context, operational deception (OPDEC), must be methodically and meticulously planned in parallel with the operation it is intended to cover. This mutual planning effort will increase the likelihood of attaining the desired level of synergism.

Historically, OPDEC has not been accepted as a basic tenet of the "art of war," but has proven repeatedly that it can contribute estimably to the satisfaction of several operational "principles of war." These principles include *offensive, economy of force, maneuver, security*, and most notably, *surprise*. "In addition to facilitating the achievement of surprise in terms of place and strength, deception can also help the attacker to surprise his adversary in terms of timing: to launch an attack earlier than expected."

Chapter II of this paper examines specific OPDEC planning considerations. In doing so, pertinent facts of historical military deceptions have been selected to emphasize the utility of these considerations. Chapter III discusses the contributions of OPDEC to the specific "principles of war" cited above. Finally, Chapter IV provides summarizing remarks and projections on the future utility of OPDEC.

## CHAPTER II

### PLANNING

Due to the inherent risks involved, effective operational planning must consider deception from the onset, and should not attempt to include it as an addition to an existing plan. The planning process parallels and compliments the deliberate and crisis-action planning procedures that are contained in the Joint Operational Planning and Execution System (JOPES).\*

Successful OPDEC planning depends on several considerations:<sup>10</sup>

Situational Analysis. The first of these is a comprehensive analysis of the enemy. This stage begins at the start of the process and continues throughout execution. In addition to examining the characteristics of the operational area, such as enemy order of battle, etc., it is here where the enemy's ability to process incoming information is studied. A determination of his intelligence collection capabilities must be made and understood. What collection assets does he possess? How are these assets employed? How much time is required to analyze collected data? Finally, how will he interpret the data? The importance of this analysis

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\*The JOPES process integrates joint operation planning policies, procedures and reporting structures supported by communications and ADP systems. JOPES is used to monitor, plan and execute mobilization, deployment, employment, and sustainment activities associated with joint operations.

not only rests on how the OPDEC might be conducted, but of equal importance, on whether the enemy is even capable of recognizing and acting upon the deception intended to mislead him. The implications here are obvious. If he is unable to identify or act upon the operation that is intended to mislead him, the deceiver has not only failed to accomplish the deception's objective, but may have even put his real operational objective at risk by committing a part of his forces to a failed OPDEC. In effect, the deceiver has violated one of Carl von Clausewitz's premier principles, "of keeping one's forces concentrated." "No force should ever be detached from the main body unless the need is definite and urgent"<sup>11</sup> and I might add, without some measure of anticipated success.

Objective Formulation. While not part of the real operational objective, OPDEC's sole existence is to support the successful accomplishment of that objective. Therefore, it is imperative that OPDEC planners work closely with the operation planners to gain a complete understanding of the operational goal and how it is to be obtained. Any effort contrary to this requirement may cause a deception plan to fail or backfire.

The key to developing the objective is determining "the action or non-action desired by the enemy commander that would be favorable to friendly forces as a result of a deception."<sup>12</sup> It is at this point that a determination is made as to if

OPDEC is suitable. If "non-action" is all that is desired, OPDEC may not be necessary. On the other hand, if controlled enemy action is desired, as is most often the case, OPDEC can provide the means of this control.

Once the validity of OPDEC has been established, the next step in developing the objective is to determine where the enemy's operational center of gravity (COG) lies, hence, the decisionmaker. It might be the operational commander or, as in many cases, the nation's leader, such as Germany's Adolf Hitler or Iraq's Saddam Hussein. This will be the target of all OPDEC efforts.

With a complete knowledge of the real objective in hand and the identification of the deception's true target or operational COG, OPDEC planners can determine the desired action they wish the deceived to take. Considerations at this point include the locations of deceptive activity and length of activity. History has proven that the more locations deception can be prudently employed, the more likely the overall deception objective will be met. Among numerous successful examples of this "deception in depth," most notable is Operation BODYGUARD, which was the overall deception plan for Operation OVERLORD, the allied cross-channel invasion of France during World War II (see Figure 2). The multiple aspects of BODYGUARD included the following demonstrations against enemy forces:<sup>13</sup>

- FORTITUDE NORTH and SOUTH, against Norway and Pas

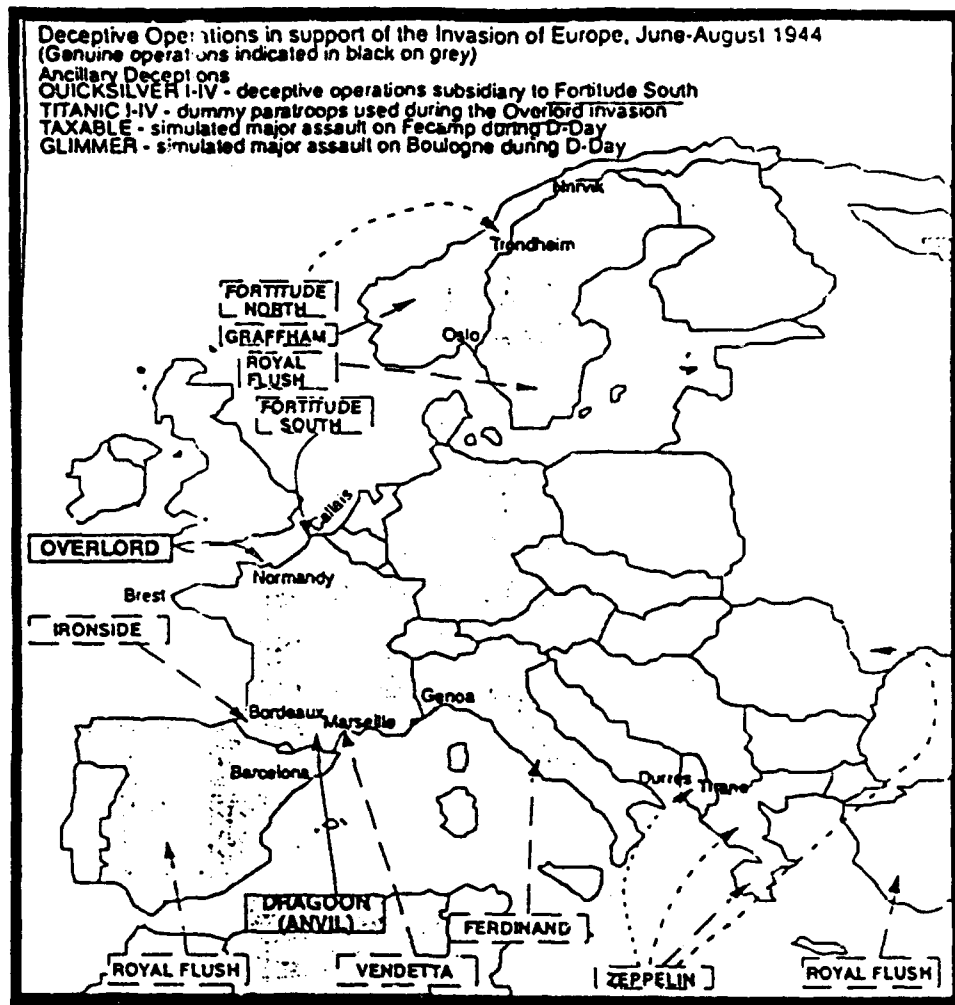


Figure 2<sup>14</sup>  
Operation BODYGUARD Deception Operations

de Calais, respectively.

- ZEPPELIN, against the Balkan States and the eastern Mediterranean.

- IRONSIDE, VENDETTA and FERDINAND, against the western Mediterranean and French Atlantic coast.

These operations, combined with counter-intelligence operations, were so effective, that the *Oberkommando der*

Wehrmacht (OKW), the German Supreme Command,<sup>15</sup> never fully realized where the true objective of the invasion was.

Finally, throughout the objective formulation process, the intended target's ability to conduct the required action or reaction must be continually gauged, the merits of which have been discussed previously. This is accomplished through the feedback process, which will be examined later.

Desired Perception. This is the perception that motivates the target decisionmaker to act in a manner that serves the OPDEC objective. To determine the appropriate perception, an understanding of the target's psyche must be achieved. This is accomplished by conducting a thorough "historical, cultural and individual background analysis."<sup>16</sup>

Both for deception and unmasking, one of the personal qualities required is being able to imagine yourself in the position of your adversary and to look at reality from his point of view; this includes not only being able to sense the world through his eyes and ears, and their modern analogues such as photographic and electronic reconnaissance, but also to absorb the background of his experience and hopes, for it is against these that he will interpret the clues collected by his intelligence system.<sup>17</sup>

Armed with the results of this analysis, the friendly operational plans and a complete mental picture of the operational area, planners should optimally focus their efforts on a perception that 1) reinforces an existing belief of the adversary and 2) convinces him that the desired action would be beneficial to his cause. An excellent example of this is the plan employed against Saddam Hussein during



Saddam, aware of the U.S.' historical propensity for amphibious assaults, was overly concerned with the possibility of such action against Kuwait's southeastern shores. His knowledge of the SEA SOLDIER and IMMINENT THUNDER rehearsals orchestrated by elements of the II MEF, combined with their deceptive efforts to prepare amphibious assault lanes, served to exacerbate those fears. Additionally, as a probable result of the perceived Coalition fragility regarding Arab and Muslim sensitivities, he believed that Iraqi sovereign territory would not be violated, thus confining the ground war to Kuwait. Finally, based on Iraqi operational difficulties when operating to the west of their positions in Kuwait, Saddam regarded a "Hail Mary" type maneuver by the Coalition forces as impracticable.<sup>20</sup>

The Coalition's ability to capitalize on Saddam's pre-existing beliefs allowed them to dictate to him where his perceived opportunity for success would lie, principally in the defense of Kuwait's southern and southeastern approaches. This mistaken perception allowed the successful execution of General Norman Schwarzkopf's "Hail Mary."

Story Fabrication. The perception story not only has to be creditable, corroborative and consistent, but executable (C3E) as well. Supporting actions must be observable and believable. Alternate courses of action (COAs) not selected for execution often make excellent stories that meet the criteria for C3E. This is exactly how General Douglas



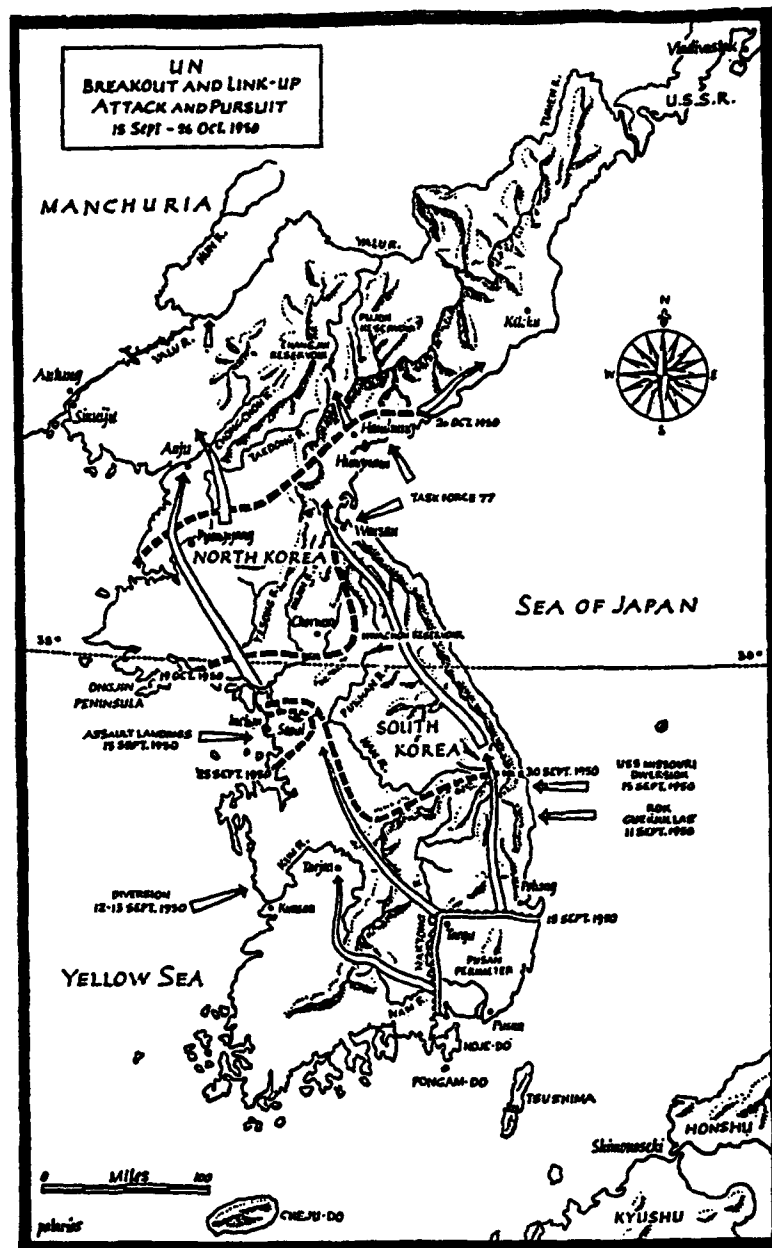


Figure 4<sup>21</sup>  
Operation CHROMITE Deception Operations

MacArthur prepared his theater of operations for Operation CHROMITE, the Inchon Landing, in September 1950 (see Figure 4).

**Beginning on D-16, Admiral Edward C. Ewen's Task Force 77**

spread preparatory airstrikes up and down Korea's Yellow Sea coast: 30 percent north of Inchon, 40 percent at Inchon and 30 percent south, with particular emphasis on the port of Kunsan, approximately 100 miles south of Inchon. "Kunsan was such a plausible spot for an 'end-run' that it had--as Plan 100-C--been one of MacArthur's three original provisional targets,...."<sup>22</sup> The original plan contained three options, which included 100-B, landing at Inchon, 100-C, landing at Kunsan and 100-D, landing at Chumumjin,<sup>23</sup> which is located on the eastern coast, near the 38th parallel. On D-4, Kunsan was the focus of a heavy bomber attack from the Tokyo-based U.S. Far East Air Force. On the following day, it became the target of a combined feint by a highly "visible and audible" 124-man U.S. Army special operations team and a Royal Navy frigate, the Whitesand Bay. Also on this day, the U.S. 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, already deceptively assigned to the Pusan "general reserve" in preparation for the Inchon landing, embarked at Pusan and was "given a semi-public briefing by loudspeaker on the hydrography of Kunsan."<sup>24</sup> Finally, on D-1, Rear Admiral Sir William Andrewes, Commander, Task Force 91, targeted Kunsan with airstrikes and psychological operation (PSYOP) leaflets from the HMS Triumph.<sup>25</sup>

While all of this activity was being conducted on Korea's western coast, the equally plausible landing site of Samchok, approximately 100 miles up the eastern coast from Pusan

Perimeter defense positions, was the target of deceptive "pre-landing softening-up bombardment."<sup>26</sup> This demonstration, conducted between D-2 and D-day (15 SEP), was carried out by the USS Missouri, USS Helena, and three destroyers comprising Task Group 95.2.<sup>27</sup>

This comprehensive deception scheme, based on very believable feints and demonstrations, significantly deceived the North Korean Peoples Army. The success of this deception effort is illustrated by the fact that when the U.N. force of more than 71,000 landed at Inchon, they were faced with an opposition of only 2,200; a more than favorable force ratio of over 35:1.<sup>28</sup>

Means Selection. The "means" are the vehicles that the deceiver uses to transmit his story to the target of deception. They can take many forms, ranging from the traditional intelligence collection mediums of human (HUMINT), signals (SIGINT), measurement and signature (MASINT), and imagery (IMINT), to open source means such as periodicals, newspapers, radio, and, most recently, television. Selection depends on the means available to the enemy. Once the most appropriate mean(s) has been determined, great care must be taken to exploit it fully. HUMINT and SIGINT, historically the most popular means, are best utilized by keeping in mind the following:

Feeding the enemy's intelligence with such information should be guided by the following rules: (1) whenever possible, supply the adversary with correct but

low grade information, bits of gossip, and 'chicken-feed;' (2) feed him correct information that *he is known* to have already obtained *independently*; (3) pass on correct, important information that will arrive *too late* to be of any real use to him and will not have actual operational value; (4) finally, supply him with information that is actually important if the sacrifice will allow one to reap much greater future benefits *which could not otherwise be obtained.*"

Undoubtedly, the most famous example of means exploitation was Britain's use of the renowned double-cross (XX) system, which was the masterful manipulation of Germany's HUMINT apparatus during World War II. It grew to become the best means of transmitting false information to the Germans.

The double-cross system, often associated with its coordinating committee, the Twenty Committee, hence the XX, was based on the turnaround of German espionage agents that had been intercepted by the British in the war's early days.<sup>30</sup> These double-agents would develop their own system of sub-operatives, often notional, who in turn would feed information and/or disinformation back up the chain, eventually ending up in the hands of the *Abwehr*, which was the German intelligence and counter-intelligence service. The British eventually created a large network of genuine and notional double-agents who virtually monopolized Germany's espionage program.<sup>31</sup> One of the most famous of these double-agents was Juan Pujol, known as "Arabel" to the Germans, and code named "Garbo" by the British. Recruited in early 1941, he created a notional network of 27 agents (see Figure 5). One of his most notable contributions to the war effort was

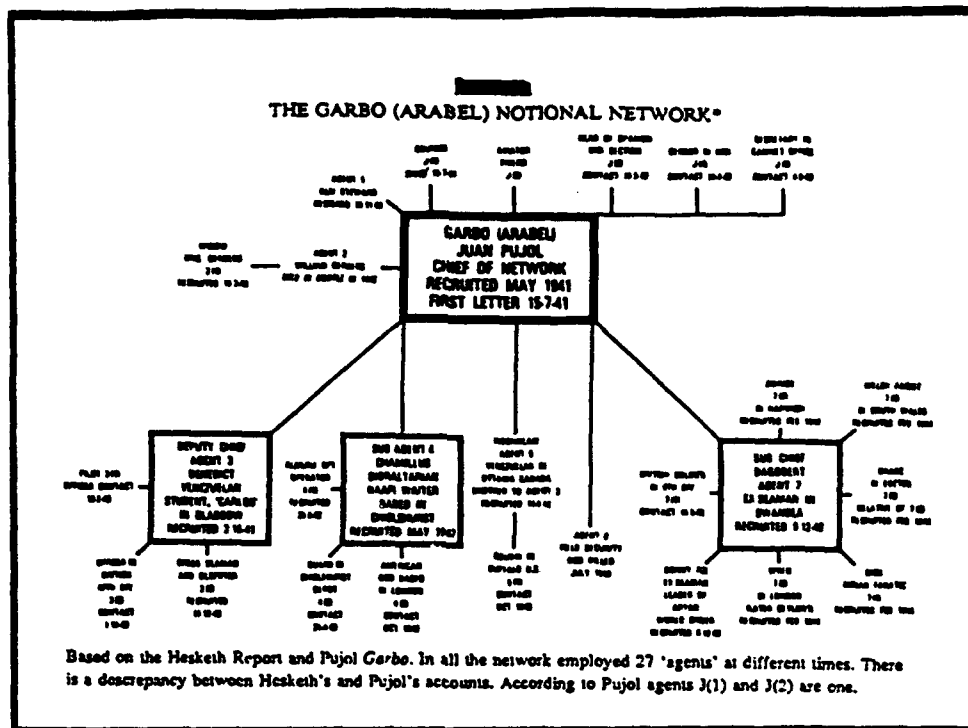


Figure 5<sup>32</sup>  
The Garbo (Arabel) Notional Network

the message (translated below) he sent to the German OKW on 9 June 1944. It reinforced the belief that the ongoing activity at Normandy was a diversion for the real landing being conducted at Pas de Calais.

After personal consultation on 8th June in London with my agents Jonny [misprint for Donny], Dick and Dorick, whose reports were sent to-day, I am of the opinion, in view of the strong troop concentrations in South-East and Eastern England which are not taking part in the present operations, that these operations are a diversionary manoeuvre designed to draw off enemy reserves in order then to make a decisive attack in another place. In view of the continued air attacks on the concentration area mentioned, which is a strategically favourable position for this, it may very probably take place in the Pas de Calais area, particularly since in such an attack the proximity of

the air bases will facilitate the operation by providing continued air support.<sup>33</sup>

Once this message was received, Hitler cancelled preparations for movement of the German 15th Army into the Normandy region, thus negating badly needed reinforcements.

The successes of the British XX system as a means of OPDEC transmission were based on the same principles that guide contemporary means selection, which include:

- the ability to identify and exploit a suitable intelligence system, in this case, the German espionage program.

- the recognition that deception stories must be planned and coordinated to the minutest detail and based partially on factual and verifiable information and on realistic and creditable disinformation.

- the realization that unexploitable enemy intelligence means must be denied access by the application of effective operational security (OPSEC) measures.

- the establishment of a robust feedback system, such as Britain's *Ultra*, that allows constant monitoring of OPDEC's effects on the enemy.

Feedback. Adequate feedback is one of the most critical factors in conducting successful OPDEC. It provides the means by which the operational commander can determine the success,

failure, compromise, or unintended effects of his deception efforts. When critical factors of a pending or on-going OPDEC are known to him, decisions to continue, modify or terminate the operation can be confidently made. Without an established and viable feedback mechanism, the operational commander runs the risk of not only threatening the success and safety of his OPDEC forces, but the overall successful execution of the real operation as well.

Britain owes much of the success of its World War II double-cross system to the feedback provided by *Ultra*. *Ultra* was the code name given to SIGINT derived from Enigma-enciphered radio transmissions. The Enigma Machine (see Figure 6) was used by the Abwehr to encrypt and decrypt high-level message traffic.<sup>34</sup>

In conjunction with the double-cross system which depended on it, *Ultra* was the single most important means of facilitating deception available to the Allies. Indeed, this revolutionary source of information provided the deceivers with *real time* access to the most closely-guarded plans, perceptions, wishes and fears of their enemy. It was the ideal tool for determining how to design a deception cover plan that would best reinforce existing German perceptions of the Allied threat. After implementing a particular ruse, the deceivers could rely on *Ultra* to monitor the degree to which it had been accepted by the Germans, then follow this up by fine-tuning continuing deception cover plans with the other means at their disposal.<sup>35</sup>

Today, the operational commander may be limited to the use of national assets to fulfill this feedback requirement. To acquire the services of these often very effective tools, he must coordinate his efforts through the Defense

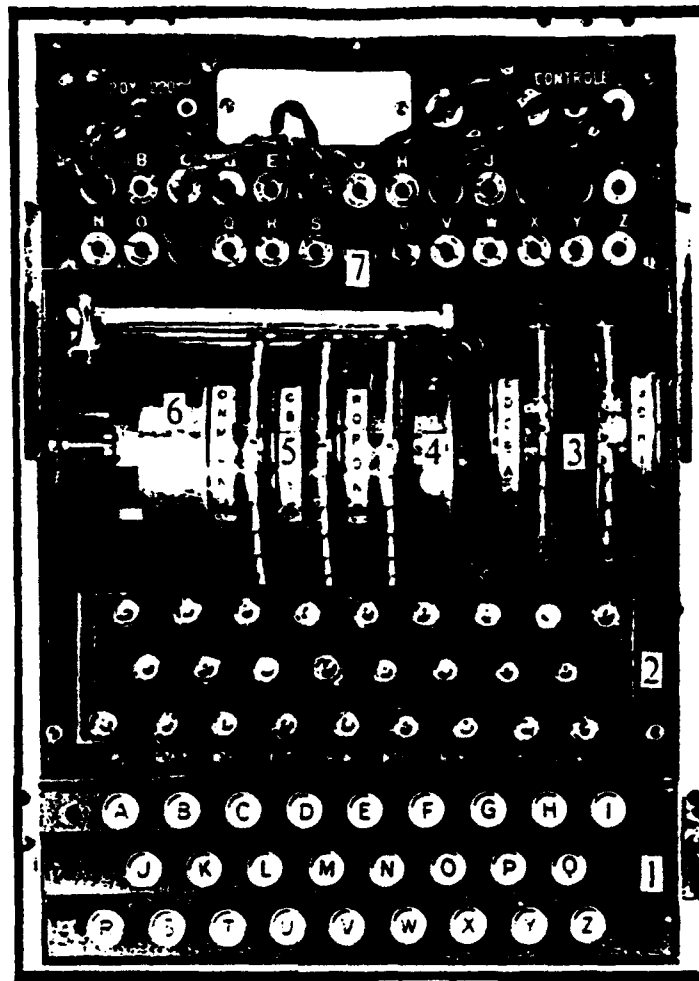


Figure 6<sup>36</sup>  
Germany's Enigma Machine

Intelligence Agency (DIA) and/or the National Security Agency (NSA) via his J-2 Requirements Division. Unfortunately, due to high demands on these limited resources, tasking them may be difficult and time consuming. More the reason to plan for the critical feedback requirement as far in advance as allowable under the existing circumstances.

Termination Planning. Termination of OPDEC may take three basic forms, two of which are under the commander's



control. The first, for which he has no control over, is the exposure of an operation by the mere fact of its execution. The II MEF's amphibious feints during Operation DESERT STORM are a classic example. Once Coalition forces had successfully executed their western desert "Hail Mary," it was painfully clear to Saddam Hussein that he had been duped by the perceived amphibious threat off the Kuwaiti coast. The second form involves the voluntary exposure of deception's success, to be used only if it is a PSYOP goal to underscore the adversary's ineffectiveness. The third and most often practiced form of OPDEC termination involves measures to protect it from compromise. This method accomplishes two objectives: 1) it preserves the tactics and techniques for future use and 2) it affords protection for the deception organization and process. Due to its OPSEC intensive nature, this form of termination must be carefully planned for, well in advance, and include built-in flexibility to react to unforeseen circumstances such as premature termination due to compromise.<sup>37</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### OPDEC AND THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

From Sun Tzu's time to the present, military scholars have attempted to base the art of war on a set of tenets known as the "principles of war." Current U.S. operational doctrine incorporates nine such principles that "should be the focal point for unified and joint planning and operations."<sup>38</sup> These include *objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity*. OPDEC contributes directly to five of these principles:<sup>39</sup>

Offensive. *Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.*

An operational scheme that retains the initiative through offensive action forces the enemy to react vice act. As a result, freedom of action is maintained, which increases the probability of attaining decisive results. Successful OPDEC gives the operational commander the opportunity to gain and hold the initiative by forcing the enemy to react to desired "deception perceptions," which cause him to violate the principles of mass and economy of force. History has proven that when OPDEC has been employed, the initiative has either been seized or retained, thus leading to positive results.

Economy of Force. *Employ all combat power available in the most effective way possible; allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.*

Deception often requires the diversion of friendly combat power. While there are inherent risks in doing so, OPDEC serves the higher purpose of gaining superiority in an area where decision is desired.<sup>40</sup> In this context, OPDEC satisfies the definition of economy of force, by effectively employing available power at a location that diverts the enemy's attention from the main objective. When this is accomplished, friendly superiority and initiative can be gained at the main objective. In this way, OPDEC contributes much to operational success at a minimal risk.

Maneuver. *Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through flexible application of combat power.*

In the operational context, this is the how the commander sets the terms of battle. OPDEC is a flexible application of combat power that manipulates the perceptions of the enemy in order to put him in an disadvantaged position. "It is often possible by adopting all kinds of measures of deception to drive the enemy into the plight of making erroneous judgements and taking erroneous actions, thus depriving him of his superiority and initiative."<sup>41</sup> It is then that he becomes subject to the friendly commander's terms.

Security. *Never permit the enemy to acquire unexpected advantage.*

"Security results from the measures taken by a command as protection from surprise, observation, detection, interference, espionage, sabotage, or annoyance."<sup>42</sup> Until now,

OPDEC has been discussed mainly from an offensive viewpoint. But in reality, it possesses a kind of split personality. While creating advantageous conditions for the offensive, it acts as a defense against enemy detection of friendly combat preparations as well.

Surprise. *Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.*

Surprise can produce success well beyond the effort expended. Deception is a powerful means of achieving surprise in war. It is an effective and economical way to create a condition that will cause the enemy to be caught unaware and unprepared, therefore giving the deceiver an opportunity to achieve victory.

Hence, deliberately to create illusions [deceptions] for the enemy and then spring surprise attacks upon him is a means, and an important means, of achieving superiority and seizing the initiative....These two things--creating illusions for the enemy and springing surprise attacks on him--are used to make the enemy face the uncertainties of war while securing for ourselves the greatest possible certainty of gaining superiority, the initiative and victory.<sup>43</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

History has shown that the use of OPDEC has almost always given its perpetrator a significant advantage over the adversary. However, as with all great things, it does not come easy. Successful OPDEC depends on a comprehensive planning process that requires meticulous attention to detail and coordination throughout the operational spectrum. As you have seen, OPDEC planners must work closely with the operation planners and consider 1) the current and forecasted operational situation, 2) what enemy action is desired, 3) what perception will cause him to take that action, 4) what situation will produce the desired perception, 5) what means will be employed to create that situation, 6) what feedback mechanism will be exploited in order to monitor deception status, and finally, 7) how will the OPDEC be terminated. When this process is strictly adhered to, successful OPDEC is within the operational commander's grasp.

OPDEC's notable contributions to the "principles of war" make it one of the most important and economical force multipliers available to the operational commander. When faced with overwhelming opposition or in a position of relative strength, it gives him the ability to exploit the element of surprise and dictate the terms of battle and therefore, seize and retain the initiative. In either

circumstance, he does so at a much lower cost in time and force degradation.

The artful use of stratagem can also permit a numerically inferior army to concentrate superior forces at the decisive point through the device of notional threats....Even for the numerically superior side, the use of such a ruse facilitates the achievement of decisive results at a lower cost by reducing the opponent's resistance at the key point."

Here lies the true significance of OPDEC. In a period of dwindling military resources and the resultant ever-increasing dependence on quality vice quantity, today's operational commanders must take every advantage to preserve their apportioned forces. When this is combined with a growing national abhorrence toward combat mortality, OPDEC becomes an extremely valuable and economical operational tool. While OPDEC is not an end in itself, it will, as it has in the past and will continue to do in the future, swing the initiative to its user and expedite ultimate victory.

## NOTES

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